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TAGS: PREL SO IT

SUBJECT: ITALY IN AGREEMENT ON SOMALIA OBJECTIVES

REF: A. STATE 4808
1B. ROME 3037

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David D. Pearce for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Italy generally agreed with the talking points on Somalia policy in Ref A, according to MFA Somalia Coordinator Giancarlo Izzo. In a January 16 meeting with poloff, Izzo noted the importance of finding consensus among the international community, and listed involving civil society, keeping the deployment of Ethiopian troops as short as possible, and improving the credibility of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) as key priorities. The TFIs needed to rely less on the international community and to open a dialogue with civil society in order to improve its credibility. Italy was still willing to host a donors conference for Somalia in Rome. Somali TFG Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, in Rome January 7, told Italian press the Parliament voted against him because the voting was not done by secret ballot. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff shared Ref A points and airstrike fact sheet with Somalia Coordinator Giancarlo Izzo January 16, stressing that the United States was making a long-term commitment to work for stability in Somalia. Izzo welcomed this, noting that the EU has sometimes viewed U.S. policy toward Somalia as short-term. A/S Frazer's meetings with women and civil society leaders were a very good initiative, he said. Involving civil society would be key to moving forward.

13. (C) In a January 12 meeting with poloff, Angelo Masetti, Spokesman for the Italy Somalia Forum (ref B), also stressed the importance of reaching out to civil society and business leaders. Masetti was doubtful the TFG had the capacity to effectively dialogue with civil society. He suggested the international community could identify key civil society leaders and provide them with funds to identify and address needs locally. Masetti also noted the importance of the Somali diaspora, and urged the United States to involve diaspora leaders, especially since many of them wanted to return to Somalia to help rebuild the country.

14. (C) Emphasizing the need to shorten the presence of Ethiopian troops in Somalia as much as possible, Izzo noted that they damaged the credibility of the TFIs. Somalis needed to be involved in providing security as much as possible. An international peace operation should involve local forces, providing training for a future Somali army and helping avoid the impression of an imposed international presence, especially in the Ayr areas. Participation of troops from Arab countries could also help increase the effectiveness of an international force.

¶ 5. (C) The TFG needed an international force to strengthen its position, according to Izzo, but TFI leaders also needed to rely less on the international community and take on the business of governing. Providing essential services would be especially important to creating stability. At the same time, Ethiopia would need to know that Somalia would remain non-threatening. Izzo suggested a regional agreement providing security guarantees for Horn of Africa countries could help reassure Ethiopia.

¶ 6. (C) Italy continued to be willing to host a donor conference for Somalia at the appropriate time, Izzo said. Prime Minister Romano Prodi would participate in the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa January 29, and was likely to meet with President Yusuf on a strategy for the TFIs going forward, including the possibility of replacing Prime Minister Gedi (although Italy did not view that as a short-term issue). According to Izzo, Yusuf would be key to renewing the face of the TFIs and gaining greater acceptance among Somalis.

¶ 7. (U) Speaker Hassan was in Rome January 17 to meet with Deputy Foreign Minister Patrizia Sentinelli and Speaker of the House Fausto Bertinotti. He told Italian press that the Somali parliament was occupied by foreign troops and President Yusuf's intelligence services and was not able to vote freely. He had been elected Speaker of the Parliament with a secret ballot vote, but January 17 he lost his position in a show of hands vote that was not free, Hassan pointed out.

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